bomber's moon

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by moonrocks

Summary

Gale goes with John to London.

Somebody should have told them there was a war on.

Chapter 1: Part I

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Gale is quietly amazed when London is just as cosmopolitan as the magazines make it out to be. At the train station, he and John pass more different kinds of uniforms than they can count. Canadians and Australians, Frenchmen and Poles, Indians and New Zealanders all mingle freely with Brits and Americans. From the Navy to the Army to the Air Force, dress blues, browns, and greens flood the streets, interwoven with civilian men and women in smart suits and their Friday best.

So far removed from the mechanical predictability of Thorpe Abbotts, the sensations are overwhelming. The city bustles like a beating heart, and Gale nearly loses John in the crowd before he feels a familiar hand on the small of his back, guiding him out of the station and onto the street.

“Don’t get lost on me now, Buck,” John says next to his ear.

“Hell, I’m not trying to,” Gale insists.

Outside, John hails a cab like he’s done it a thousand times before. Gale stuffs his barracks bag inside the trunk and climbs into the car after him. They ride to their hotel, glued to their respective windows as the car threads through the cobbled London streets. Red telephone booths dot the sidewalks, intermittent between piles of rubble leftover from the most recent bombings.

“I feel like I’m in a Conan Doyle novel,” John remarks.

“Yeah,” Gale says as they pass the remains of a bombed-out shopfront, “if Professor Moriarty flew a Heinkel.”

The cab passes Hyde Park on its way to Mayfair, and they get a glimpse of the anti-aircraft guns sticking out from between the trees. Being on the other side of the air war is strange, especially in a city much like the others the Eighth has bombed. Before now, Gale had never been to Europe. He’d barely been out of his home state. He doubts he could discern the average German town from that of the Brits if he was looking at it from above. The thought is unsettling, but Gale refrains from voicing it. John is looking out the cab window with

delight, his face bright and smooth from worry like a child's.

The cab pulls up to their hotel and they grab their bags and get out. The stony facade of Grosvenor House is masked by piles of thousands and thousands of sandbags, its many windows darkened necessarily by blackout curtains. Officers of all kinds loiter outside, smoking and chatting away in an array of accents. It hits Gale's ears like a musical cacophony as he follows John into the lobby.

John checks them in while Gale stands in the middle of the brocade-patterned carpet with his bag slung over his shoulder, looking at the crystal chandelier hanging above him. It's a far cry from their barracks back at base, and Gale feels a pang of guilt stab him in his middle. He'd initially refused to come — he really isn't the type to paint the town red — but John had worn him down, even when he insisted he didn't want to leave the men. It was hard to say no with John's lips on his neck and a hand inching up the front of his uniform.

Gale checks his watch. It could be any moment now that the boys leave for Bremen. He grabs a toothpick from the tin in his pocket, nervously fidgeting with it until John comes bounding over, a key in hand.

"The concierge was telling me this place used to have an ice rink," John says with a grin. "The cooling system is still under the floor of the Great Room. Apparently, the Princess learned how to skate here. You ever skate back home in Wyoming?"

Gale shakes his head, twisting the toothpick in his mouth. "Not a lot of ice rinks where I'm from, Bucky."

"Yeah, just oil rigs and bison."

They take the elevator to the tenth floor and find their room at the end of the hallway. The room is more modest than the lobby was but still nicer than anywhere Gale has ever stayed before. It divides itself down the middle with two adjacent four-poster beds, an armoire, chaise lounge, and an ottoman. A radio is perched atop a stained walnut desk in front of the curtained windows. In the bathroom sits a claw-foot tub and an ornate wooden vanity, along with a small shower in the corner.

Gale sets his barracks bag down on the spare bed they won't be using and goes over to the window. He pulls the blackout curtains back and muted October sunlight floods the room.

“I could get used to this,” John says behind him, loosening his collar.

He stretches out on the other bed in socked feet while Gale looks out onto the busy street below. In the distance, he can see the faint bulge of barrage balloons, and he’s reminded again of Bremen. He looks at his watch a second time.

“Sick of me already?” John asks.

Gale looks up. “Just wondering when the boys are shipping out,” he says.

John sits up, sliding towards the edge of the bed. He pats the space beside him and Gale saunters over. John reaches out and grabs either side of Gale’s waist, urging him closer. Gale stands between John’s legs as he peers up at him, a contented look on his face.

“They’ll be fine,” John reassures and draws a steady circle with his thumb on Gale’s hip. “Our boys know what they’re doing. Try and forget about it for a while.”

Gale nods. It’s good advice, but advice he probably won’t be able to take. John reaches up and undoes Gale’s tie.

“We’re in London,” he says and smirks. “We can do whatever the hell we want.” He pulls gently on Gale’s tie, ushering him forward. “Unlimited hot water, steak and champagne. Eat, fuck, and be merry.”

Gale’s stomach flutters, and he can’t deny that he likes the sound of it when it comes out of John’s mouth. He hasn’t slept in a proper bed in over a year, or taken a hot bath in months. He’s wondering if the hotel restaurant serves ice cream when John yanks him downward, wrestling him onto the bed. They tussle, Gale reaching over and grabbing a pillow to smack John over the head with. John retaliates by pinning him against the mattress, swinging his leg over Gale’s waist to straddle him. For a moment, Gale is carefree and laughing like a little kid, then John is kissing the breath from his lungs, their fingers interlocking above their heads.

“Did you lock the door?” Gale asks when John pulls away.

John nods, but his lips don’t leave Gale’s for long. They kiss again, saccharine and slow. This is the most privacy they’ve had since starting this thing between them, and Gale wants to savour it. Empty airplane hangars and abandoned haylofts just don’t compare. If he’s going to be away from his men, he might as well not waste the

opportunity.

Gale's chest swims in anticipation as John reaches between them and undoes Gale's belt and fly. He sinks below Gale's waist, nudging his stirring cock through the fabric of his pants with the side of his face, pressing his nose into his thigh and breathing him in. Gale swallows a moan before realizing they can probably be louder here than they are back at base.

"Take off your shirt," John instructs as he begins to drag Gale's pants down his thighs.

Gale unbuttons and unbelts his jacket, then slips his dress shirt and loosened tie off over his head. His clothes fall into a heap on the floor. He lies back down in the sheets, feeling completely exposed as a fully dressed John smiles impishly above him. He discards Gale's pants and underwear, then pulls off his socks one by one.

Gale doesn't have much time to feel self-conscious before John is leaning over him and taking the head of his cock in his mouth. Gale shivers at the sensation. John's tongue is wet and warm and cloying, bringing out in Gale an animalistic warmth from deep in his core.

They've done this a few times before, always rushed, always wanting to linger in the afterglow but never being able to. Gale feels newly virginal with the slowness of it all, John gradually working his cock into his mouth, taking a little bit more, then a little bit more.

Gale tries not to squirm underneath him, reaching down and carding his hands through John's hat-mussed hair. John grips Gale's shaft and begins to stroke him in time with the bob of his head, and Gale nearly comes right then and there. He bites down on his lower lip, John's name at the back of his throat.

John pulls off briefly to catch his breath, but he makes up for it by pumping his hand faster around Gale's cock, palm slick with saliva now. Despite himself, Gale lets out a soft groan, eyes closing as his back arches slightly off the bed. John laughs and his breath is hot against Gale's thigh.

"I like the sound of you," he says and kisses the inside of Gale's leg, nipping at the skin there. "Talk to me, Buck. Say my name."

Gale shudders. He's not sure he can properly form the word inside his mouth with John's hand between his legs, rooting out something inside him that he's had buried for quite some time. John coaxes out

the unabashed desire in him that he otherwise keeps hidden. Gale learned a long time ago that there's no use wanting anything during a war. It's always going to be a waiting game to see whether or not he survives, and until then, he has to put his wants on hold. John is different though. All John seems to do is want, whether there's a war on or not. Gale has never seen him satiated, and when he cares about something enough to hold onto it, he rarely ever lets it go.

"Bucky," Gale finally says, low in his throat, and his hips snap up to meet John's fist.

John smiles. "My name and yours."

With that, John takes Gale back into his mouth, swirling his tongue around the head of Gale's cock and inching him in deeper. Pressure builds behind Gale's pelvis and he knows he's close. He squeezes John's shoulder as a warning, but John doesn't pull off.

His refusal is just enough to send Gale over the edge, warmth flooding him from head to toe as he spills into his mouth. John swallows around Gale, keeping his eyes fixed on him even as he shivers and shakes. His hips jerk, chasing the wet safety of John's mouth once more before his orgasm plateaus. He comes to with a quiet gasp, and John finally pulls off him, breathing heavy.

Gale doesn't say anything, just reaches down and grabs John by the front of his uniform. He drags him up to eye level and kisses him, open-mouthed and thankful. He tastes himself on John's tongue, and it turns him on enough to cut through the pleasant fog of his fading orgasm. He almost wants to go again, right there, right then.

John is grinning once the kiss breaks, his lips kiss-bitten and shiny with spit.

"Where the hell did you learn that?" Gale asks.

John wipes his mouth on the back of his hand. "Wouldn't you like to know? What's that saying? About a magician and his tricks?"

Gale shoves him, and John snickers.

"What?" he says. "You never gave any blowies in flight school?"

Gale frowns. "You know I didn't, John."

John's smile fades. "Right, well. You didn't miss much. Just Lieutenant

Teddy Bishop and his huge, hairy balls."

Gale falls silent. He hates to think about John with other people, but especially with other men. In almost every aspect of his life, Gale prides himself in his experience. He likes to know what to do in every situation he finds himself in, always relying on prior knowledge when things go awry.

Besides some heavy petting with Marjorie and another girl from high school, John was Gale's first for everything. Meanwhile, John has done it all before, and more times than Gale could ever ask him about, even if he wanted to. Gale has given John almost every part of him, but he feels like he has nothing of John's to hold onto in return.

John must see the hurt on Gale's face because he reaches out and grabs Gale's hand. "Hey, what's wrong? What did I say?"

"Nothing," Gale says, pushing his unease down. He takes his hand away. "I'm gonna clean up."

He gets up from the bed and heads to the bathroom, his dog tags tinkling against his chest.

"What, and leave me here all alone to play with myself?" John calls from the bedroom.

"You could join me," Gale says and reaches over to turn on the tap.

The water thunders into the tub, warm within seconds. Gale runs his hand under the stream and sighs, letting what tension he can pour out of his fingertips.

"Nah, you go ahead," John says. Gale hears him walk across the room to the door. He can tell he puts his shoes back on by the way his footsteps change. "I need a drink. I'll be at the hotel bar if you need me."

The bolt unlatches, then the door opens and shuts.

Once the water has reached just below the overflow drain, Gale steps inside the tub, then lowers himself down. It instantly soothes the aches in his muscles. His head falls back to rest on the edge and he counts his breaths: one, two, three, four. Then, there it is again, the guilt.

The water swells around Gale's bare chest, and he's suddenly aware of

the quiet luxury of his surroundings: the plush embroidered towels, the pink hand soap, the meticulously dusted light fixtures over the sink. Gale closes his eyes and sees the fiery blasts of flak exploding around him, hears the incessant drone of German fighter planes tearing through the sky beside his fort. Parts of bodies and parts of planes litter the air, burning or bleeding. Gale thinks of his men, up over Bremen without him, and he forgets to breathe.

Gale must lose track of time because when he opens his eyes again, the sky is darkening and the door is opening. He startles at the sound of John, humming a Vera Lynn tune under his breath, and realizes he's been sitting in cold bathwater for some time now. He shivers as he comes back into his body and grips the sides of the tub, but finds it hard to move or gather enough strength to lift himself out.

Footsteps approach and then John is in the doorway.

"Jesus, Gale," John breathes, then immediately, he's beside him, helping him out of the bath. "What's the matter with you? Your lips are blue."

"I don't know," Gale says and his teeth chatter. "I don't know what happened."

John grabs a towel off the rack and wraps it around Gale, then half-guides, half-carries him into the bedroom. He sits Gale down on the bed and kneels in front of him, rubbing at his shoulders, arms, and thighs to get him dry. John stands back up, then tugs off his jacket. He quickly undresses.

"What are you doing?" Gale asks, still shivering.

"Skin-to-skin contact," John says, now shirtless, unbuttoning his pants and tugging them off with his underwear. "Don't they teach you this stuff in Wyoming?"

John pulls the damp towel from Gale's shoulders, then crawls underneath the blankets with him. He holds Gale flush to his chest, entwining their legs for as much contact as possible. John feels like a furnace, so warm against Gale's frigid skin that it's almost painful. It works though, and Gale soon feels the colour coming back to his cheeks and the feeling returning to his fingers.

John presses a kiss to the nape of Gale's neck. "You're okay," he says and his breath is a warm salve against Gale's shoulders. "I got you."

A few minutes pass, then Gale rolls over. He stares at the ceiling, trying to will his mind to be blank. The last thing he wants to do now is talk about it, but of course, John asks.

“Do you want to tell me what’s going on?”

“I don’t know,” Gale says and tries to swallow the lump forming in his throat. “I must’ve gotten lost in thought.”

“That’s pretty fucking lost,” John says with a sympathetic laugh. “What were you thinking about?”

“Home,” Gale lies.

“What about home?”

“The oil fields my father worked on.”

“Yeah?” John reaches out and strokes Gale’s cheek with his thumb. “Tell me about them.”

Gale does as he’s instructed, recounting what he remembers of the oil fields around Casper, their history of boom and bust, how his father was lucky enough to keep his job during the Depression, even though he bet away his wages. At some point, they fall asleep entangled in each other’s arms. When Gale wakes up, his stomach is rumbling.

He redresses while John naps, then gently wakes him up. “How about that steak and champagne?”

They head downstairs to the Great Room, which has been newly converted into an officers’ mess. A hundred or more tables line the large dining hall in impressive rows, intricate glass chandeliers scintillating above them. A waitress dressed in a white smock shows them to their table.

John orders them two steaks with green beans and a bottle of champagne for the table, even though he’ll be the only one drinking. They’re surrounded by other officers, eating and chatting away in their pristine uniforms, and Gale didn’t expect to feel so at home in London.

The waitress comes back with John’s bottle of champagne and he insists on uncorking it himself. It opens with a celebratory pop. A little bit spills out onto the floor and their waitress giggles, putting a hand with red-painted fingernails over her mouth. John has a bad tendency

of charming everyone he meets. He's always been popular with the locals. They look at him like he's some kind of movie star, Clark Gable or Cary Grant. Gale can't really blame them. John looks especially handsome tonight, his hair slightly curled from sex and combed off his forehead. The scars on his face from Regensburg only serve to make him more intriguing to the unfamiliar eye.

John pours himself a glass of champagne and raises it to his lips. He takes a long, grateful sip, humming pleasantly as the taste hits his tongue.

"Oh, Buck, you gotta try this."

Gale is fine with his bottle of Coke, but John keeps insisting, tipping the champagne flute towards him.

"Come on. Just a sip. Do it for me. We're in London for Christ's sake."

Gale sighs and takes it from him, staring skeptically at the bubbles that fizz to the surface. He takes a tentative sip, just enough to coat his tongue. The carbonation is pleasant, and it's sweeter than he expects, but it's not good enough for him to make a habit of it. What's more intoxicating is the wide grin that John flashes him as he swallows it down.

"Wow," John says. "Never thought I'd see the day."

Gale hands him back the glass. "Yeah, well, don't get used to it."

The champagne warms Gale's belly and makes him more eager for his food. It comes a few minutes later, and they eat with great ceremony. It's been maybe a year since Gale had a proper steak, not just army hamburger meat, and his tongue sings with the richness of it. They shoot the shit while they dine, talking about nothing in particular. Gale almost forgets about the Bremen mission for a while, almost.

Once their plates are licked clean and John has drunk half a bottle of champagne, they pay their bill and hit the streets. John brings the bottle of champagne with him, taking swigs from it intermittently between drags of a cigarette. Gale checks his watch: 2100. The boys are back by now.

"Maybe we should phone base," Gale says. "See how things went."

John blows a raspberry, and Gale can tell the alcohol is finally starting to hit him. "Why are you so dead-set on ruining a perfectly good

evening?"

They duck down an alleyway faintly illuminated by a fly-spackled lamp post, passing a chipped brick wall plastered with rationing posters.

"You think it went badly?" Gale asks.

John shrugs. "I don't know. We just know the odds, Buck, is all."

They walk for a while longer before happening upon a pub, the door wide open and the golden glow of lantern light leaking out. Gale hears the sunny sound of music and immediately knows John is a goner. John abandons his bottle of champagne on the sidewalk, grinning from ear to ear, and reaches for Gale's hand. He drags him inside.

Thirty minutes later, John has befriended half the patrons in the pub. Gale watches from a corner table as John disappears into a pack of Englishmen, singing at the top of his lungs some English folk tune Gale has never heard before, but of course, John knows all the words. Gale sips at his ginger beer and laughs under his breath. At the other side of the pub, a group of RCAF pilots are engaged in a game of darts. Gale considers joining them when John returns to their table, a glass of whiskey in his hand.

He leans in close, his lips nearly brushing Gale's ear. "You don't know how badly I want you right now."

The back of Gale's neck burns. "John," he chides. "Not here."

John knocks their knees together underneath the table, then takes a sip of his whiskey. He leans in again. His breath smells sweet, like vanilla.

"God, this hooch is making me horny."

"*John*."

He laughs, tipping his head back. "Y'know, you saying my name like that isn't helping, darlin'."

Gale's throat tightens at that, and he isn't sure why it makes him emotional. Maybe it's the pet name that leaves John's mouth so easily, like a breath of air. Someone puts a coin in the jukebox and a sleepy jazz tune pours through. A few of the couples hanging out by the bar make their way to the dance floor. They begin to sway in time to the

music.

“Wish I could dance with you,” John says sullenly, looking down into the bottom of his whiskey glass.

“I’m sure you could find a more willing partner,” Gale says, pointing to a girl standing by herself at the bar. She’s dressed in a floral pencil dress, her long brown hair pinned to her head in cylindrical curls.

“You think I should go over and ask her?” John says and looks over at Buck with a somewhat indecipherable expression on his face.

Gale isn’t sure what game they’re playing. “Go ahead,” he says, like a challenge, and John gets up from his seat, downing the rest of his whiskey as he goes.

Gale watches John tap the girl on the shoulder, his charm immediately dialled to 100. He leads her to the dance floor, a hand falling to her waist. They begin to rock back and forth, but John never pries his eyes away from Gale. They watch each other from across the room, and John smiles softly, like he did when Gale was dancing with Meatball a few days before.

It’s oddly intimate, and Gale finds himself picturing himself in the girl’s place, John’s arms wrapped around his waist, close enough to lay his head on his shoulder. He feels a pang of jealousy. It’ll never be the two of them on the dance floor like that, out in the open and unashamed. Gale feels his heart seize at the thought, and his eyes drop from John’s gaze. He finishes his ginger beer as the song fades out. John thanks the girl for the dance, then returns to their table.

“Hey,” he says. “Let’s get out of here.”

The moon is bright and full when they leave the pub. It hangs low in the sky, silver and bulbous like an onion. They walk back to the hotel mostly in silence, John smoking another cigarette down to the nub. Gale simmers, going over the events of the day in his mind. He didn’t expect leave to be such a draining experience, but being in London is different from being back at base. There’s so much life, and Gale feels stranded in the midst of it, out to sea with only John to anchor him when John can barely anchor himself.

They retreat to their room and Gale changes out of his uniform, pulling on a t-shirt and pyjama pants. John sits by the window with the radio on, listening to the highlights of the latest Yankees playoff game. It cuts to commercials and John beckons Gale over. Gale

obliges, coming to stand between John's legs. John wraps his arms around his middle and falls forward, resting his head on Gale's stomach.

Gale looks at the moon again, and the sky is so light and clear Gale thinks he could pilot a B-17 clean through it. "You know what the Brits call a full moon?"

"What?" John asks, and his voice vibrates against Gale's belly.

"A bomber's moon," Gale says. "They say it's a bad omen. Makes it easier for the Luftwaffe to hit their targets."

"S'that so?" John lifts his head from Gale's stomach. "Fucking morons. Maybe if they flew their missions during the day they wouldn't need to rely on the fuckin' moon."

Gale laughs, John smiling devilishly up at him. It's enough incentive for Gale to lean down and kiss the grin off John's face. The radio crackles and the dulcet hum of a clarinet floats through the air.

"Dance with me?" John asks.

Gale nods. "Alright."

John stands up and guides Gale to the middle of the room, their fingers intertwined. He puts his hands on John's waist, his head resting against John's shoulder. They stumble over each other's feet at first and John huffs.

"Christ, would you let me lead?"

"Never," Gale says.

They sway back and forth, and John drops a kiss into Gale's hair. After that, they make their way to the bed, John's hands roaming underneath Gale's loose t-shirt. John kisses him hard as they fall back against the pillows.

"Want you to fuck me," John mumbles into Gale's jaw.

Gale's cock stirs. "Okay."

He grabs a tin of Vaseline from his bag and sets it on the nightstand. They slowly undress each other, Gale peppering kisses on John's skin as his clothes fall away. They lie there naked for a moment, just holding one another until John reaches over for the Vaseline. He sets

it in Gale's palm.

"I want you to do it."

Gale raises his eyebrows at him. Usually, John takes care of it, at least he has the few times they've managed to be that intimate, quickly working his fingers into himself before sliding Gale inside.

"What do I do?" Gale asks.

John laughs. "You're a smart guy, Buck. I think you can figure that one out."

Gale kneels between John's open legs. His gaze weighs heavy on Gale, piercing him in the dark as he slicks his fingers. With his other hand, he gently nudges John so he raises his legs slightly. Gale reaches between them, finding the cleft of John's ass. He rubs at the ring of muscle there, fingers slippery with Vaseline, and John lets out a pleased moan.

"Feel okay?" Gale asks.

"Better than okay," John says. "Keep going."

Gale nods, inching his index finger forward and slowly sinking it inside John. John sighs as it slips in, his mouth falling open. He's relaxed and pliable, making it easy for Gale to slide another finger inside him. John's erection twitches against his stomach as Gale pumps his fingers. Gale wants desperately to kiss him, but it would be too much to focus on all at once. He wants to make sure John feels good first and foremost.

Without really meaning to, Gale beckons his fingers upwards towards John's pelvis and John gasps. Gale freezes, unsure if he's hurt him, but John's eyes are half-lidded, his front teeth sinking into his bottom lip.

"Don't stop," John says after a moment. "Keep doing that."

Gale does as he's told, repeating the motion. John moans again, louder now, and the sound is enough to stir desire in Gale's belly, hot and wanting. He continues to finger John, gently adding one more. He must be about ready, but the last thing Gale wants to do is stop. He loves the groans he's eliciting from John with the mere twitch of his fingers. He's never felt so affecting.

"If we keep doing this I'm going to come," John says, a bit out of

breath. “Get over here.”

Gale removes his fingers, using what remains of the Vaseline to slick his cock. After not being touched for a few minutes, his lubed hand is almost enough to get him off in a few strokes, but he knows John will feel even better. Gale shimmies up the bed, hovering over him. They look at each other for a moment, and Gale wishes he had something to say, but everything he comes up with dies unceremoniously in his throat. He can only lean over and take John’s mouth in his, lining himself up between his legs and pressing inside him.

“*God*, Gale,” John rasps against his lips.

Gale enters slowly, but the slick, tight heat of him is still almost too much to bear. He snaps his hips, chasing the feeling, and John wraps his arms around his torso, his head falling back against the pillows to reveal the white line of his throat. Gale drags his teeth down to John’s Adam’s apple as he fucks into him, feels the vibration when John moans. He’s characteristically loud without Gale’s cock in his mouth, and the realization almost makes Gale laugh.

They kiss again, then Gale dips his head to suck a bruise into John’s right pec, still keeping up the rhythm of his thrusts.

“Fuck,” John swears. “I’m gonna come.”

Before he can, Gale reaches between their bodies and takes him in hand. He’s only able to stroke him a few times before John is spilling into his fist, shaking with the force of it, a groan ripping through his throat.

“That’s it,” Gale says, fucking him through it.

He’s close himself, abandoning John’s cock for a moment to chase his own orgasm. It hits him like a freight train. He squeezes his eyes shut as his core tightens and he comes, thrusting into John one last time before collapsing onto his chest.

When he comes to, John is looking at him with enough boundless affection to make Gale’s heart soar. He runs a hand through Gale’s hair.

“Welcome back to earth.”

Gale snorts. He goes to roll over but John holds him in place.

“Not yet,” John says. “Don’t want to lose you.”

They lie there for a while, a sticky, sweaty mess. The room smells like sex and Gale desperately wants a shower. He’s going soft inside John when he finally pulls out and lies down on the bed beside him.

“Shit, I feel drunk,” John says.

“You are drunk,” Gale says.

John rolls his eyes. “Not very gentlemanly of you to take advantage of a girl when she’s vulnerable.”

“You started it.”

John smiles. He rolls over to face Gale, propping up his head with his elbow and running a hand down the length of Gale’s chest. He fiddles with his dog tags, turning them over in his fingers.

“I didn’t like seeing you like that earlier,” he says after a moment. “Scared the shit out of me.”

“I know.” Gale tries to swallow down his embarrassment. “Let’s forget about it.”

John shakes his head. “I don’t know what I’d do if something happened to you.”

Gale doesn’t understand why John wants to talk about this now. Maybe the sex has him all relaxed and loose-lipped, but Gale feels the opposite. He doesn’t want to blight what they just did by talking about something so serious.

“John,” Gale sighs, and he doesn’t know what to say.

John looks at him, his stare weighty. “I’m just glad you’re down here with me and not up there, that’s all,” he says. “I’m happy you came with me. I had a bad feeling about Bremen.”

“Yeah, me too.” Gale leans over and kisses John on the forehead, then gets out of bed and goes to the bathroom to run the shower.

He’s only in there for a couple of minutes before John slips in after him. They wash off, Gale helping to clean the come from John's stomach and in between his thighs. John plasters himself to Gale’s side underneath the hot stream of running water, and Gale feels John’s cock stiffening again against his thigh.

He's too tired for another round. He's just about to voice his refusal when John says, "You're a good pitcher, but have you ever thought about catching?"

Gale looks at him, brow furrowed. "What are you talking about?"

John smirks, water running off the ends of his hair. "In other words," he says, "would you ever let me fuck you?"

Gale's stomach swoops. He knew this would be coming at some point, but he didn't expect John to ask so soon. He's thought about it before, of course he has. He's wondered what it would feel like to have John inside of him, buried deep where no one else can reach, but back on base there's always been the issue of convenience. There are only so many places they can be alone. Even then, they're constrained by time and the fear of being caught. Being here in London is the first time Gale has felt free enough to be with John in whatever way he wants, at least within the confines of their hotel room.

"I don't know," Gale says. "Do you think I'd like it?"

"I'd hope so," John says, running a hand through Gale's wet hair. "It doesn't make you any less of a man if that's what you're worried about."

"It's not," Gale says, but it isn't necessarily true.

He doesn't think about John in that way or consider him any lesser for it, but when he pictures himself doing the same, hot shame rips through him, like his desire is bottomless and contemptible for its bottomlessness. Gale hasn't seen his father in over two years, but he still wonders what Jim Cleven would think of his only son stripping himself bare for another man.

"Well, you mull it over then," John says and pats Gale on the cheek. "Are you done in here?"

Gale nods and John turns off the water. They dry off, then get ready for bed. Gale slips under the covers next to John. He's so exhausted that he's asleep as soon as he closes his eyes.

The bomber's moon must really be a bad omen because when Gale wakes up again, it's to the blaring of air-raid sirens. At first, he can't tell if his nightmares are just bleeding into reality, but then John is shaking him awake, coaxing him out of bed.

“Buck, get up. We’ve got to get to the shelters.”

Guests flood the hallways in their pyjamas, housecoats, and slippers, many of them soldiers on leave who are eerily calm as they traverse the staircases into the basement. Hotel employees usher the crowds in the right direction. Gale fixes his eyes on the back of John’s head in case he loses him in the commotion. Even in the stairwell, they can hear the anti-aircraft guns booming across the street in Hyde Park. The windows shake with the force of it, and Gale wonders which part of London the Luftwaffe is hitting, how close they are to their targets.

The sizable basement is lined with rows and rows of cots, the space dimly lit by intermittent sconces on the wood-panelled walls. Gale follows John to a cot in the corner and they sit side-by-side, not speaking. Gale has never been on the other side of a bombing before, and the thought that this is the kind of carnage he’s wreaked upon others is more unsettling than the faint sound of explosions in the distance. He wonders if John is thinking the same thing when he glances over at him and finds his eyes busy, weaving through the swaths of people.

“You should try and go back to sleep,” John says after a minute. He pulls back the blanket from the cot.

“Not sure I’ll be able to,” Gale says.

There’s a loud bang above them, and Gale flinches, John’s head snapping towards the sound. The chatter amongst the hotel guests cuts abruptly, and the room is silent for several seconds. Eventually, they seem to be in the clear and the basement fills with low nattering again.

“Nasty work, these bombs,” John says.

Gale’s chest tightens. “We should know,” he replies. “We’ve dropped a whole lot of them.”

Another bang, but the reaction this time is less so. Already, the guests are adjusting to the constant sound of bombs. Gale picks through the crowd, his eyes landing on a woman in a silk nightgown with curlers in her hair. She sits on a cot with her two children, a boy and a girl who can’t be any older than six. The building shakes above them and she holds them to her sides, their heads ducking away from the noise.

“Come on,” John says and pats Gale on the shoulder. “Lie down. I’ll wake you up if the ceiling’s caving in.”

“Alright,” Gale says, and finally tears his eyes from the woman.

He lies down, facing the wall, and pulls the blanket up to his chin. John sits at the edge of the cot.

“I’ll be right here,” he reminds him.

Their backs are pressed up against one another. John’s body is solid and warm, and it’s a comforting enough presence to lull Gale toward sleep.

Gale dreams he’s sitting in his B-17 bomber, cutting through an azure sky. The clouds around him are thin and wispy like spun sugar, and John is beside him, his tan sheepskin pulled up around his neck. He’s grinning behind his air mask and they’re going faster than they have any right to be. Gale can’t hear the whir of their engines, only the pleasant peal of John’s laughter. When the bomb bay doors open, however, the sound morphs into something else: hot air expanding outwards, rolling fire as the city below them goes up in flames. Then, a child’s scream.

When Gale wakes with a start, it’s been several hours. The raid has ended, and they’ve been given the all-clear. Gale follows John back to their room in a sleepy haze, crawling under the covers with him as soon as they’re through the door.

Somehow, the rest of his sleep is dreamless.

Chapter End Notes

> Thank you for reading and please let me know your thoughts! Part 2 should be up in the next few days.

Chapter 2: Part II

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The spot beside Gale is empty when he opens his eyes that morning. He stirs in bed, then sits up, brushing his hand over the cool sheets. Half-drunk with sleep, he's not sure where he is. The bed is much too big and too soft to be his rack back at base, the room too dark and quiet to be the barracks. Gale slowly comes to, realizing, then rises with a familiar guilt sitting on his shoulders. He opens the blackout curtains and overcast light seeps into the room.

John left a note on the desk, written neatly in the hotel stationery. Gale picks it up and reads it.

Went on a coffee search and rescue. Meet me at the ice rink?

- B

Gale shaves, combs his hair back, then dresses in his uniform. He looks for the newspaper on the mat in front of their door, but John must have taken it with him downstairs.

Gale finds John in the Great Room, sipping a coffee and reading a London travel pamphlet for American GIs. The newspaper sits on the table beside him, pinned underneath his elbow.

"Good morning," Gale says as he sits down in the seat across from him.

John smiles behind the lip of his coffee cup. "Morning, Sleeping Beauty."

Gale rolls his eyes. "You could've woken me."

"You looked peaceful," John says. "Like a newborn baby. I didn't have the heart."

"Have you eaten yet?"

John shakes his head. "Just coffee."

A waitress comes by their table and Gale orders a cup of coffee and a

plate of bacon, toast and eggs over-easy. John gets the same.

“Where’d you get that?” Gale asks, pointing to the pamphlet.

“One of the bellhops gave it to me in the lobby,” John explains. “I’m planning out an itinerary.”

“Is that so?”

John sets down his coffee cup in its saucer and leans forward in his chair. “I think we should hit up Trafalgar Square this afternoon, see the sights. There’s the National Gallery. Most of the good stuff’s been evacuated to the countryside, but the building hosts daily concerts.” John sets down the pamphlet in front of Gale and points to a map printed on the inside. “Tonight, we could go to Picadilly. The Rainbow Room is supposed to be a popular spot with American GIs, then we could take a walk around Buckingham Palace, have tea with the King.”

Gale nods, looking down at the pamphlet. John leans back in his chair.

“Or, alternatively,” he says under his breath, “we could just stay here all day and fuck each other’s brains out.”

“Bucky,” Gale warns. He folds up the pamphlet and hands it back to him.

John holds his hands up in surrender. “I’m just saying. It’s just a suggestion.”

Gale concedes, giving him a small smile, then his eyes fall to the table again. He looks at the newspaper, trying to read the headline upside down. John must notice his gaze because he sets his arm back down again, blocking Gale’s view.

“John,” Gale sighs. He holds out his hand. “Give me that.”

“No can do, Buck,” John says.

“Come on. Either give it to me or I’ll go out and buy one. I’m gonna find out at some point.”

John purses his lips, but he removes his elbow, passing the newspaper across the table to Gale. Gale scans the front page. The leading story is something about mining unions, but one of the subheadings quickly

catches his eye: *Eighth Air Force Smashes Bremen.*

Then, below it, *30 BOMBERS LOST.*

Gale freezes, his stomach dropping to the floor. For a moment, the world falls away, and all he can hear is the blood rushing in his ears. He feels like he did yesterday in the bath, like he's being pulled away from his body, suspended in time and looking down at somebody he doesn't recognize. His heart races, but before he can fully succumb to the feeling, he stands up. The legs of his chair scrape against the floor and he accidentally bumps the silverware. It clatters against the table and John is looking at him, concern lining his face.

"Buck—"

"I need some air."

Gale makes a bee-line to the nearest exit, a door near the kitchen that leads to an alleyway outside. Gale bursts out onto the street. He breathes fast and heavy, panic churning in his chest and bile rising in his throat, but nothing comes up. He grips the brick wall to steady himself, and then John is bounding out after him, pressing his hand into the small of Gale's back, grounding him to the earth.

"Just breathe," John says.

Gale tries to find a rhythm and gradually begins to calm down, coming back into his body. The damp, cold October air bites at his cheeks, and John is hovering above him, fear thick in his eyes. John doesn't often get afraid, but when he does, Gale can always see it on his face, naked and monumental.

"What's going on, Buck?" he asks.

It takes Gale a moment to find his voice. "I don't know," he says. "I don't know what's happening to me."

John grabs hold of his arm. "Come on, sit down," he says and lowers Gale to the ground. He sits beside him. "Has this happened before?"

He looks at Gale expectantly like he already knows the answer, he's just trying to get Gale to admit to the lie. Gale knows he's caught, so he doesn't fight him.

"Yesterday," he says, "in the bath."

John presses his lips together in a tight line. He tips his head back against the brick wall and looks at the sky, avoiding Gale's eyes. "You're a bastard, Buck Cleven. Don't you know you can tell me anything?"

Gale swallows, his throat dry and tight. He's not sure what he's so ashamed of, or why he keeps the things from John that he does. He supposes, in a way, he's trying to protect him, keep all his feelings locked away someplace he can't reach. Gale's father was a drunk and a hothead. He never understood the need for self-control, and Gale's mother paid for it time and time again. Gale is so used to overcompensating, like the part of him he got from his daddy is cursed. He always has to drown it or shut it up. That's what he learned makes a man.

Of course, Gale has no idea how to voice any of this to John, so he just says, "Yeah, Bucky. I know," and leaves it at that.

John looks at him then, and the worry on his face has only softened, not disappeared. "Should we get you a doctor?"

Gale shakes his head. He's never seen it personally, but he's heard stories about airmen who've bought the farm, pilots who scream in the night, who can't close their eyes without seeing planes explode behind their eyelids. Gale couldn't risk it. He can't be pulled out of his squadron and sent to some convalescent hospital, not now, not ever. He can't leave the men.

"I'll be fine," Gale says, trying to sound reassuring. He isn't sure it's very convincing. "We should call base. Check up on things."

They walk out into the street and find an empty telephone booth. John insists on calling, in case the conversation gets Gale worked up again. John holds the handset to his ear.

"Norfolk 7322, please," he tells the operator. A beat passes and John slides a coin into the machine. "Red, Egan here. How'd the game go yesterday?"

Gale watches as John listens to what Bowman has to say, straight-faced, his expression indecipherable.

"Thanks, Red. See you soon."

John hangs up and gets out of the booth, closing the door.

“How’s my crew?” Gale asks, his heart pounding against his ribcage.

John takes a breath, not quite meeting his eyes, then says, “They went down swingin’, Buck.”

For the second time that morning, bile crawls up Gale’s throat. He clenches his jaw. “Should’ve been up there with them.”

“Hey, don’t say that. Come on.”

John grabs Gale by the elbow and guides him back into the alleyway. When they’re tucked away enough, John pulls Gale into his arms. He presses his hands into Gale’s shoulders and holds him there against him. Gale lets his head fall into the crook of John’s shoulder. Tears roll down his cheeks. He’s embarrassed, but he can’t stop them. He just stands there and silently lets them fall, getting the collar of John’s uniform wet. After a moment, John pulls away and cups Gale’s face in his hands, rubbing away the moisture on his cheekbones with his thumbs. For a second there, Gale thinks John is going to kiss him. He would welcome it gladly, but it’s too risky, and John doesn't.

“Red told me there’s going to be another game tomorrow,” John says instead.

“Yeah?” Gale makes his mind up straight away. “I want in.”

John looks resigned, like he’d anticipated Gale’s answer before the words even left his mouth. He smiles sadly. “I’ll go with you. We can leave early tomorrow morning.”

They forget about their breakfast and return to their room. Under John’s orders, Gale goes back to bed for a while. He drifts in and out of sleep while John listens to the radio and reads a paperback he brought with him from base.

Around lunchtime, John shakes Gale awake. He’s ordered room service for the both of them: two Cokes and two chicken sandwiches, each complete with a heaping pile of French fries. Gale scarfs his down, his hollow stomach grumbling, while John eats his bite-by-bite in between filling out crossword clues. He asks for Gale’s help when he reaches an especially difficult one, and they attempt to solve it together, albeit unsuccessfully.

Gale feels paradoxically more at ease now with a mission looming over his head. He’s still mourning the loss of his men, but he’s always felt better knowing there’s a job he needs to do, that he’s useful. He

can focus on something outside of himself, instead of being forced to look inward.

When they've finished their sandwiches and John's given up on the crossword, they lie in bed together, partly undressed. John presses kisses to the length of Gale's throat, his hands sneaking up his undershirt to pet his sides. It's strangely chaste, like they're two fumbling teenagers overwhelmed by the new and vast opportunities to touch and feel. Gale gets embarrassingly hard embarrassingly fast.

"Want you," he mumbles into John's hair, dropping a kiss onto the top of his head.

"You sure?" John asks. "You're feeling okay?"

Gale nods and cocks his head to kiss John, tender and slow. John nudges Gale back against the pillows then straddles his hips. His lips are back on Gale's neck as he slides his undershirt up to the middle of his abdomen. His teeth graze the fleshy underside of Gale's jaw. He nips at the skin there, brings it into his mouth.

Gale gasps. "*John*, be careful."

"Sorry," John says and laughs, his breath warming Gale's chin. "I just wish people could know you're mine."

At that, Gale's breath catches in his throat, his heart singing inside his chest. John pulls Gale's undershirt over his head and throws it aside, then does the same to the t-shirt he's wearing. He bows his head to carve kisses down Gale's collarbone and sternum. Gale seeks purchase in John's hair, squeezing his eyes shut and pulling gently at his roots. John hums at the pressure, then softly bites down on Gale's pec just below his nipple. He sucks the skin into his mouth and Gale moans.

The love bite is blooming bright red like a rose petal when John pulls off with a slick pop. He's smiling and Gale is suddenly acutely aware of his erection, pinned between his inner thigh and John's ass. As if reading his mind, John begins rolling his hips in Gale's lap, his hand lacing around his dog tags as he grinds against him. Gale grips John's waist and feels moisture building on the inside of his leg. He could probably come from just the friction, and he's once again apologetic for his inexperience.

Gale reaches for John's belt in a silent go-ahead and they undress the rest of the way. He almost loses it completely when John returns to his lap and their cocks brush. John doesn't seem to notice half as

much as Gale does, reaching over for the Vaseline on the nightstand.

Gale watches with curiosity, unsure of what John has in mind as he slicks his palm and brings it in between their bodies. Then, John lines up his hips parallel to Gale's and wraps his hand around both their cocks. His hand is large and calloused and, combined with the slip of the Vaseline, feels perfectly made for pulling Gale apart.

Gale's mouth falls open as John begins moving his hips and their cocks slide together. John leans over him and kisses his chest again, sucks another bruise into his collarbone. When he lifts his head, he presses their foreheads together.

"Look at you, Gale. You're so perfect," John says, cupping Gale's face with his spare hand. The affection thick in his voice makes Gale's throat feel tight. "Goddamn, you feel so perfect. You're so damn good for me."

It almost makes Gale want to sob, at least to release the throng of feelings battering up against his ribcage. Instead, he tells John to kiss him.

Their lips meet and John continues to buck his hips against Gale's. Heat builds in Gale's belly and the friction suddenly becomes too much. The tension snaps and he falls apart with John's tongue in his mouth, making a quick mess of the narrow space between their bodies.

"Just like that," John says and continues to thrust into his hand, his cock dragging lewdly against Gale's.

Gale almost squirms away from him, overstimulated, but he tries to lie still as John chases his orgasm. He doesn't have to wait long before John spills out onto his belly, gently sinking his teeth into Gale's shoulder as he comes.

He rests his weight on Gale for a moment before removing his hand. Getting up from the bed, he goes to the bathroom and returns with a damp hand towel. He kneels between Gale's legs and cleans the come from his stomach. The towel is warm from the water, soothing Gale's wired muscles as John drags it around his softening and spent cock.

When he's done, John leans over and presses a kiss to the head of it. Gale doesn't know what to say. He's never been treated so tenderly by someone before or felt his body being worshipped like it's a precious object, something that needs to be held with steady hands.

“Come here,” Gale says and John crawls underneath the covers with him.

They spoon, John’s solid chest pressed to Gale’s back and their legs entangled. Gale likes being able to feel him breathe, to sense the warmth of his skin and know he’s still there. Gale can easily imagine sharing a foxhole with him if in some other universe they had joined the army and ended up in the same platoon. It’s hard for Gale to picture any version of his life where John isn’t there. For the last few years, he’s been a given, always by Gale’s side or a step behind him, a hand on the small of his back.

The safety of John’s arms ushers Gale towards sleep yet again, one that is shallow and dreamless. When he wakes up, the light pouring in from the windows is tinged gold from the setting sun. He’s alone in bed. Across the room, the bathroom door is ajar and the light is on.

Gale peels the sheets from his legs and pads into the bathroom. John is standing naked at the sink, shaving cream on the lower half of his face everywhere but his mustache. He drags his safety razor across his cheek and down his neck then rinses it in the sink.

“Got a date?” Gale asks, leaning against the door frame and crossing his arms.

He sees John smile in the reflection of the mirror.

“I was hoping,” he says and continues to shave his face. “Haven’t asked her yet. I get all tongue-tied around this broad, y’know? She’s pretty gorgeous, Buck. Blonde. Sparkly blue eyes. Big cock.”

John laughs at his own joke, rinsing his razor under the tap again. Gale rolls his eyes, but he’s dangerously close to blushing. He comes up behind John, dropping a kiss between his shoulder blades then joining him at the sink.

“She sounds like a peach,” Gale says.

“Yeah? So how ‘bout it?” John asks. “Dinner and a show? You and me?”

“I could be persuaded.”

Gale reaches over and takes the razor from John’s hands. John wordlessly tips his chin back and lets Gale shave the rest of his face. He gently runs the razor over John’s skin, down his chin and over his

Adam's apple, then rinses away the shaving cream in the sink.

"Be careful with the merchandise," John says when Gale gets a bit too close to his mustache. "I have this thing insured."

Gale laughs. "I'm sure you do."

It's easy to be light and carefree around John, but the reality of their situation inevitably comes crawling back. They'll have to be back at base by game time tomorrow. They'll have to go up there, and their time here together will have been a blip, the equivalent of a faded postcard stored loose in Gale's footlocker.

John must see the change in Gale's expression because he sighs and says, "Big day tomorrow."

Gale nods. He doesn't know how he feels about his chances, especially after losing so many men yesterday. It's like John says, they can only know the odds. It's the only sure thing. Gale can only hope that he doesn't crack up when it comes down to it, that if he dies, it's quick and dignified, and that the aftermath won't break John, that he'll be able to go on without him.

The thought makes Gale falter. He accidentally presses the razor too hard against John's neck.

"Ow," John says and Gale jerks his hand away, the razor clattering into the sink.

A spot of red bleeds through the white shaving cream like blood on snow.

"Shit." Gale reaches for a tissue and presses it to John's neck.

"Hey, it's okay," John says. "I don't mind bleeding a bit because of you."

Gale doesn't know how to respond to that. He just looks at him, then John reaches out and brushes his thumb over the love bites on Gale's chest, first the one on his collarbone, then the one on his pec. He presses into them slightly and they ache in a good way, like the pain is reminding Gale that he's alive, that he belongs to someone and he can still breathe and be bruised.

"Guess we're both marked, huh?" John says.

Gale smiles softly. “Guess so.”

John finishes shaving his face. He wipes the shaving cream from his cheeks with a towel, then asks, “How do you feel about French food?”

They get dressed, then take a short cab ride to a bistro across from the Palladium. They sit at a table in the corner, tucked away from the other patrons. John orders a glass of merlot and Gale takes a small ceremonial sip from it like he did the night before. He makes a face as he hands John the glass back.

“What? Don’t like it?” John asks.

Gale shakes his head. “It tastes like perfume.”

“What do you know?” John says in mock offence. “You don’t drink!”

John is slightly flushed with alcohol by the time their food arrives. He’s especially handsome in the candlelight, and Gale realizes this is the first date they’ve had, or at least the first one they’ve labelled as such. John orders the duck legs confit with roasted potatoes and asparagus. Gale gets the seafood cassoulet. He makes sure to savour every bite, knowing he won’t eat another meal like this in a place this nice for a long time.

Once they’re finished and John has downed a couple more glasses of wine, they pay their tab and walk across the street to the Palladium where a popular comedy troupe is performing. They sit together in the theatre, their knees knocking as they watch the show. John laughs, loud and bright, slapping Gale on the lapel at every especially funny joke. Halfway through the show, one of the comedians pulls out his best Hitler impression, producing a comb from his pocket and pressing it to his upper lip. He clomps around the stage, heiling at nothing and shouting in gibberish. Gale catches John’s eye and they smile at each other, Gale’s heart skipping in his chest.

Afterwards, they pour out of the theatre and onto the street. The air is pleasantly cool and the moon is shining low in the sky. It lights their way as they walk down Regent Street, passing through Piccadilly Circus then over to Trafalgar Square. The monument rises high above them, impressively carved from grey granite and guarded by four bronze Barnaby lions. John reads the plaque below it as Gale twists a toothpick in his mouth.

“What do you know about the Battle of Trafalgar?” John asks.

“Not much,” Gale says. “I know Napoleon had the English outnumbered, and Admiral Nelson was shot by a French sniper and died on the deck of his ship.”

John tilts his head, looking up at the statue of Nelson, sword poised at his hip. “Is that so?”

On the base of the column, a plaque depicts Nelson dying in the arms of his men. Not a bad way to go, Gale thinks. A pilot’s death is much lonelier, trapped in a cockpit and separated from one’s fellow flyers in the air, either free-falling to the ground or burning up in the sky. There’s rarely a body to mourn, let alone commemorate.

“‘England expects that every man will do his duty’,” Gale says, wistful.

John looks over at him. “What’s that?”

“It was Nelson’s final signal to the fleet before the battle.”

“Oh yeah?” John reaches over and slings an arm around Gale’s shoulders, bringing him into a light headlock. He grinds his fist into the top of Gale’s head. “And what other knowledge do you have knocking around in that big brain of yours?”

Gale laughs and wriggles free, then bounds over to one of the bronze lions. He hoists himself onto the platform. John follows him, and Gale gives him a hand to help him up. They sit there, legs dangling off the edge as they watch the crowd of soldiers and civilians alike. John pulls out a pack of cigarettes from his jacket pocket and lights one. He smokes it in thoughtful silence while Gale listens to the sound of water spewing from the fountains. He closes his eyes and lets the breeze caress his face.

“Buck?” John says after a while.

Gale’s eyes are still closed. “Yeah, Bucky?”

“If anything happens to either of us tomorrow, I need you to know something.”

“John—” Gale starts, opening his eyes, but John cuts him off.

“Please, I have to say this.” There’s something like fear in John’s eyes, but not quite. He swallows, his Adam’s apple bobbing up and down. “I couldn’t live with myself if you go down and I didn’t say it.”

Gale feels his heart in his throat. He glances away from him. “Okay.”

“Hey, come on. Look at me.”

John reaches out and cups Gale’s face, ushering him to turn his head and forcing their eyes to meet. His fingers splay out on Gale’s cheek, and they shouldn’t be doing this in public, but Gale doesn’t have the heart to refuse him.

“I love you, Gale,” John says quietly. “I need you to know that, alright? I’ve always loved you.”

Gale just stares at him, forgetting every word he’s ever learned. Butterflies swarm his chest and he wants so badly to kiss John, but he can’t. John seems to understand. He smiles, close-lipped and tender, and brushes his thumb against Gale’s cheekbone, back and forth, back and forth. After he pulls his hand away, he raises his cigarette to his mouth and takes a long drag, laughing to himself on the exhale.

“Never said that to anybody before,” he muses and flicks ash onto the ground.

Gale is dumbstruck. Finally, something of John’s that he can hold onto.

“Come on,” he says, standing up and offering John his hand. “Let’s get out of here.”

They take a cab back to their hotel. Gale is on John as soon as they’re tucked away in the dark safety of their room. Everything he’s ever felt about John he tries to express as he kisses him hard, pressing him up against the closed door and running his hands through his hair. It causes John’s cap to fall to the ground. He laughs against Gale’s lips. Gale grips the front of his uniform and guides him to the bed, then shoves him onto it.

“Eager fucking beaver,” John says as he lands on the mattress. “What’s gotten into you?”

Gale doesn’t answer, just climbs on top of him and straddles his hips. His mouth finds John’s again and he tastes like the wine he drank at dinner, like toasted plums and unsweetened chocolate. John grips Gale’s thighs as they kiss, holding him steady as he grinds up into him. A moan breaks free from Gale’s lips and John smiles.

“Don’t hold back,” he says, his voice thick with want. “Wanna hear

you."

Their lips meet again, and all at once, Gale is struck by the enormity of his desire. It sets his skin alight, his belly burning as John's tongue presses into his mouth. Their teeth clack with the force of the kiss and Gale's breath is knocked out of his lungs. He rolls his hips in John's lap and feels his erection tenting the front of his pants. Gale experimentally rubs his ass against it and John gasps, breaking the kiss.

"Shit, Gale."

John pulls back and blinks at him in awe, his gaze heavy with arousal. Gale wants him so badly he aches. He wants every part of him and in every way that he can. They're running out of time. Tomorrow, they'll be up over Germany, and Gale will have missed his chance. He's not prepared to lose John before he knows what it's like. Damn his father, damn his inhibitions, and damn the war.

Gale forces himself to say it before he loses the nerve: "I want you to make love to me."

John looks at him with a stunned expression. He studies Gale's face, like he's waiting for the punchline to a joke. "What? Really?"

"Yes, really." Gale smirks at his stupefaction. "You told me to think about it and I thought about it. I want to know what it feels like," he admits. "Will you show me?"

"Only if you're sure," John says and reaches out to brush Gale's hair from his forehead. He's looking at Gale so tenderly it makes it hard for him to return his stare. "This isn't, like, some sort of pity fuck, is it?"

Gale smiles. "Never."

"Good," John says, returning his smile. "Because I wanna be inside of you so goddamn bad."

John leans forward and kisses Gale one last time before rolling them over so he can be on top. He makes quick work of Gale's clothes, unbuttoning and unbelting Gale's jacket with record speed, loosening his tie and pulling his button-down over his head. He kneels over Gale and plants several kisses on his collarbone and chest before removing his own jacket, shirt, and tie.

"You're beautiful, you know that?" John says as he undoes Gale's belt

and slides his pants and underwear off his legs.

Gale's cock falls against his stomach, as red as his sternum when John leans over to kiss him again. Their chests press together and Gale wants to get closer. He wishes they could become a single entity, if only he could arch against John in just the right way.

John wriggles out of his pants, then hooks his thumbs in the waistband of his underwear and pulls down. Gale's body hums nervously at John's touch once they're both fully naked, their clothes discarded on the floor. John kisses him for a while longer, almost like he's afraid of initiating anything further, but each kiss is more anticipatory than the last.

"I think I'm ready," Gale says and rests his forehead against John's.

"Okay." John nods. "Let me take care of you."

John kisses Gale's temple before reaching behind them and grabbing a spare pillow. Gale isn't sure what for, but then John is nudging him in the hip.

"Lift yourself up. I'm gonna put this under you," he says. "It'll be more comfortable that way."

Gale raises his ass off the bed and lets John slide the pillow underneath the small of his back. He lowers himself back down. The angle already feels better, and the cushion of the pillow helps take the pressure off his hips.

John reaches for the Vaseline. He pops open the lid and generously coats his fingers.

"Just try to relax, okay?" John says. "If it hurts, we can always stop."

Gale nods and tries to get a hold of his breathing. He looks up at the ceiling to focus on something other than his own body. John kisses the inside of his thigh as he settles between his open legs. He presses his fingers into the cleft of Gale's ass and the Vaseline is cool and slippery against his skin. John slowly inches the tip of his index finger inside him, then pushes in to his second knuckle, then all the way. Gale tenses at the contact and he can feel John freeze.

"Does it hurt?" John asks.

"No," Gale says. "Just feels unfamiliar. Keep going."

“Okay.”

John kisses Gale’s leg again as he gently adds another finger. It helps to relax Gale when he pumps them, gradually working him open. Gale takes a deep breath and adjusts to the pressure. Unexpectedly, a soft moan escapes his lips when he exhales and John simultaneously crooks his fingers.

“That’s it,” John says and smiles, like he just made Gale do something beautiful. “Just keep breathing. You’re doing good.”

Gale nods, then John sinks a third and final finger into him. It’s a lot to take, but Gale just focuses on his breath. He brings his attention to John’s other hand on his thigh, solid and steadying, and tries his hardest not to tense up on him. John makes another beckoning motion with his fingers and it brushes a spot inside Gale that sends warmth flooding from his head to his toes.

“Oh, John,” Gale says, and he’s not even aware he’s saying his name until it leaves his lips.

John chuckles. “Yeah, I know, right? This is what you’ve been missing.” He pumps his fingers a few more times. Gale is able to relax into it better now with pleasure rushing his core and sending sparks down his spine. “Do you want me to touch you?”

“That’s a stupid question,” Gale says.

John rolls his eyes, then reaches over and uses his spare hand to stroke Gale’s cock. He’s gone partly soft from not being touched, but he responds instantly to John’s palm against his shaft. It soon brings him back to full hardness. He keeps breathing deeply, shutting his eyes and taking in the sensations as they come. John keeps up the motion of both his hands until Gale can’t stop the sounds that are emerging from his throat. John crooks his fingers again and Gale groans. His core tightens, and he feels dangerously close to coming.

“Stop, I’m getting too close,” Gale says, out of breath, and John’s hands still. “I want you, John.”

“Well, you’re in luck,” John says and grins. “You can have me.”

He removes his fingers, and Gale suddenly feels strange and empty without them. John grabs some more Vaseline and slicks his cock. He positions his body overtop of Gale’s, then bows his head and kisses him hard. It’s a welcome distraction as John slides inside him,

stretching him open much further than his fingers had. It burns at first, but Gale can handle the pain. He's too taken by the fullness of it, how whole he feels as John pushes into him all of the way.

"Fuck," John swears under his breath as he gently begins moving his hips. His breath is hot against Gale's shoulder. He kisses and licks at the skin there, then says, "You don't know how good this feels, Buck. I've been thinking about this for so damn long."

Gale doesn't know what to say, so he just kisses him, wrapping his arms around John's torso and holding him close. John continues to fuck into him, achingly slow, then gradually he begins to increase his pace. Once Gale gets used to the size of him, he's able to ease back into feeling the pleasure of being penetrated. The pillow helps angle his ass just right, and as John snaps his hips faster and further into him, he hits that spot inside Gale again and again.

Gale nearly cries out when John's cock brushes it especially forcefully, and then he's begging John to touch him. He doesn't even recognize his own voice. He's halfway to coming apart when John grasps his cock and begins jerking him off, still thrusting inside him.

"Gale," John utters, and Gale thinks he's going to say more, but he doesn't.

"John," Gale replies and squeezes him tight.

Spots appear behind Gale's eyelids and then he's coming, his head falling back against the pillows as he spills into John's fist. He shakes from the pleasure of it, heat ripping through his body and every ounce of tension in his muscles melting away. He digs his blunt nails into John's back and John gasps, but Gale's too far gone to register it. It must do something for him though because soon enough his thrusts falter. Gale feels John's cock throb inside of him as he comes, his lips on Gale's collarbone and spare hand raking through his hair.

Once John is still, all Gale can hear is the heavy in-and-out of their breathing. Neither of them says anything for a long while. They just lie there, unmoving and completely spent. Gale's orgasm fades into a dull roar, and he feels like he could fall asleep right then and be out for a thousand years. He opens his eyes and John is looking up at him, his forehead freckled with sweat. Something in his eyes has changed, like he finally knows this is a sure thing, that Gale isn't going to run off on him any time soon. They won't be parted except for divine intervention, or maybe a Kraut spitfire, whichever comes first.

Gale reaches down and runs his thumb over John's bottom lip, swollen from all their kissing and wet with saliva. John presses a kiss to Gale's thumbprint then rests his head back down on his shoulder. He's going soft inside Gale, relieving some of the pressure, and Gale's stomach is covered in his own come. They need to clean up, but Gale doesn't want to move. He doesn't want to be the first to speak either. There's only one thing he can think to say. It scares the shit out of him to voice it out loud, but if he doesn't do it now, he'll never forgive himself.

"John?" Gale asks.

"Yeah?" John replies without lifting his head.

Gale takes a deep breath. "I love you too," he says and wills his voice not to break, feeling pressure behind his eyes. "I think I've loved you for a long time."

John stirs at that. He looks over at Gale and he's beaming so wide his grin splits his face in two. "Finally, he says it. What the hell took you so long?"

Gale laughs, looking bashfully at his chest, and John leans in to kiss the smile from his face. Gale wishes they could stay here forever, just curled up in each other's arms until their flesh rots away and their bones turn to dust, but John eventually pulls out of him and lies down on the bed beside him. Gale misses him instantly, feeling empty and cold with John's come drying between his thighs but no John.

They head to the bathroom a few minutes later to clean up. John runs a towel over Gale's stomach and thighs, then goes to turn the tap on in the tub.

"I think you deserve a proper bath," John says and kisses Gale's temple.

The two of them barely fit in the tub together, but they manage to manoeuvre themselves so they're sitting comfortably enough. Gale lies between John's splayed legs, his back to his chest. The water laps dangerously at the sides of the bath as John playfully splashes Gale's face. Gale turns his head and kisses John's neck, scrapes his teeth against it in warning. Droplets collect on the silver plating of their dog tags plastered wetly to their chests.

They sit in the warm water together, not saying anything of note. Gale is tired after the day they've had, and he's afraid if they talk too much

they'll circle back to their mission tomorrow. Gale just wants to enjoy the time they have left. He knows what's coming in some ways, and in others, he's completely blind. It's not any different than any other mission they've embarked on, except now there's more at stake. Gale could lose all this. It wouldn't take much. A catastrophic engine failure, a little piece of flak to the right, a Messerschmitt with a good shot, and he'd be dead in a field or dying in a prison camp.

Gale has a sick thought. If either of them is going to go down, he hopes it isn't John. He hopes it's him. He couldn't lose John and continue on. He wouldn't be able to take the pain. Gale looks at John leaning back with his head against the tub, his eyes closed and his face lineless, and he prays to God that if it has to be one of them that he goes first, that John gets left behind, not him.

Gale craves sleep. Once they've drained the bath and brushed their teeth, they crawl into bed, lying with their naked bodies flush against each other. John still appears wide awake, while Gale is quickly fading. John strokes Gale's hair and his heavy eyelids flutter closed. Gale embraces the black and for a while, he swims in it, content in John's arms.

He awakens to the blast of bombs for the second night in a row, but this time they're far off in the distance, muted, like someone threw a blanket over that part of the city to muffle the sound. John is sitting on the chaise lounge, the blackout curtains pulled back from the window so he can watch the fireworks show in the distance. The anti-aircraft guns are blazing and John's face lights up in the dark with every explosion. It's a Fourth of July more spectacular than any they've ever seen back home.

Gale sits up in bed, rubbing the sleep from his eyes. "Bucky," he says. "What are you doing up?"

John startles slightly at that, jerking his head away from the window to look at Gale. "Oh," he says. "I couldn't sleep. Thought I'd catch the show."

Gale swings his legs off the bed and gets up, walking over to him. He sits beside John on the chair, looking out the window. The sky is glowing, an eerie orange colour, like a low-burning fire.

"These bombs…" John trails off. "Do you ever think about it?"

"Think about what?" Gale asks.

“I don’t know. All the killing we’ve done,” John says. “Because looking out on this, this is us to them, right? Don’t you think about it?”

Gale watches as another burst of fire brightens the sky. “I don’t know, John. I try not to. We’ve got a job to do. Same as everybody else.”

John laughs through his nose. “Hell of a job.”

“Come on.” Gale motions his head to the side. “Come back to bed. We have an early day.”

“Okay,” John says, but he remains in the same spot. He leans over and presses a kiss to Gale’s jaw, then rests his head in the crook of his neck. “I guess in some circumstances I could lose all sympathy.”

“How so?” Gale asks.

There’s the reflection of flames in John’s inky pupils when he looks up at Gale and says, “If they ever took you away from me” — he shakes his head, like even thinking about it pains him — “I wouldn’t care where my bombs dropped, Buck. I’d kill them all.”

Gale doesn’t know what to say to that. He hates the thought of it, John losing his humanity on his account, but he can’t even begin to voice it. It’s too late for this conversation anyway, and he doubts John would even be receptive.

“Look who’s flak happy now,” Gale jokes instead, his heart still in his throat. “Now get your ass in bed.”

John does as he’s told.

The next morning, they pack their things, dress, and grab a light breakfast at the officers’ mess. Gale feels a pang of sadness as John hails a cab and they stuff their barracks bags into the trunk. They were only at Grosvenor House for two days, but Gale had started to form an attachment to their quiet room tucked away on the tenth floor. He’s going to miss the privacy when they’re back at base, and the ever-flowing hot water.

They ride in silence to the train station, again passing mounds of debris left in the wake of last night’s barrage. The cab pulls up to the curb and they get out, Gale paying the driver as John retrieves their bags. When he meets John on the sidewalk, he’s staring across the street. A small apartment building lies in ruins, half of its facade torn

off by heavy shelling. A woman shrieks as police and firefighters surround the building. A little girl, no older than ten, is pulled from the wreckage, her body limp and splayed as the officer carries her down a downslope of smouldering bricks.

Gale looks on in horror, the woman's screams cutting through the Sunday morning calm. John doesn't tear his eyes away, even when Gale squeezes him on the shoulder, trying to signal to him that they should leave to catch their train. He looks ill, his face pallid and his scars standing out bright red against his white skin. When he finally responds to Gale's nudging, he looks in Gale's general direction, but won't fully meet his eyes.

In silence, they get their tickets and find their seats on the train. John isn't speaking, even when Gale suggests they go to the smoking car. When they pull away from the station, Gale watches London shrink into a pinprick. Germany awaits, and John is already far away.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for reading! Let me know your thoughts.

I'm on tumblr at ww2yaoi.

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